

The Visual and History Practice in the Digital Age

ISCHE 39 Pre-Conference Workshop (PCW), July 17, 2017

Convenors

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Introduction

While much of qualitative research is dominated by language, the desire to create images has spanned the evolution of human kind, from ancient cave drawings to the billions of ‘selfies’ currently taken on mobile devices every year. We use images not only to represent the world around us, but also to share our feelings with others, whether as an act to memorialise an important moment or to communicate the emotional reality of that moment to others. Today’s technology means that we can all claim the status of documentary photographer. Taken cumulatively such images are signifiers of a culture; taken individually they are evidence of our existence and can be analysed accordingly.

‘Seeing is believing’ is an old adage that is present in many languages. This phrase suggests that, under ‘modernity’ (however that term is understood in respective cultures), sight holds a privileged position in the hierarchy of the senses. Yet despite the wealth of visual imagery available to us, with the exception of art historians, it is fair to say that the use of such imagery is still a minority interest amongst most historians. Relatively few historians work in photographic and film archives, relatively few historical journals carry illustrations and, even when they do, not many contributors take advantage of the opportunity to theorise about their deeper, and even hidden meaning. When historians use images, they tend to treat images as mere illustrations or, as Raphael Samuel commented, as ‘eye-wipes’. If they are discussed they are generally used to illustrate conclusions reached by other means. This is despite the unstable meaning images frequently display when viewed by different audiences. While written texts continue to be afforded greater historical respect as more profound and elaborate indicators of the past than the visual.

That said, many cultural theorists have argued that we are in the midst of a major transformation which marks the end of the centuries long text-based linguist turn in Western society. In recent years there is evidence of a growing interest among some researchers in using images to enhance our understanding of the human condition, including when cultural meaning is to be scrutinised. Some historians have begun to actively engage with the ‘visual’ or ‘pictorial turn,’ a trend that is also evident amongst historians of education.¹ But this engagement and the claims made for the visual have also been the focus of some sharp debate. Catteeuw et al (2005), for example, conclude: ‘Our standpoint ... is that the “pictorial turn”... can only be useful in that it draws more attention to visual aspects of the reality of teaching and education, and so there is no need for infinite analyses about the “representation of education and teaching in visual sources”’. Additionally, they argue, source material is too limited in its content and number to be a representation of reality and can only really be used as a complement to the textual sources with which it has to be interpreted (Catteeuw et al, 2005: 229).

Currently the use of the visual in history of education is addressed in the annual History of Education Summer School and was a founding principle of Network 17 Histories of Education of the European Educational Research Association. The convenors believe that as visual communication is becoming more and more central in the domains of public communication we need to create a space where we can engage in critical transnational dialogue about the use of the visual. The aim of the proposed pre-conference workshop (which we see as a possible precursor to establishing an ISCHE Standing Working Group) is to begin such a dialogue about the visual and to map the issues about our practice

¹See, for example, Joseph and Burnaford, 1994; Margolis, 1999; Grosvenor, 1999; Depaepe and Henkens, 2000; Burke, 2001; Rousmaniere, 2001; Grosvenor, 2004; Margolis and Rowe, 2004; Mietzner, Myers and Peim, 2005; Pozo 2006; Burke and Grosvenor, 2007; Devlieger, 2008; Priem 2009; Rubi, 2010; Braster, 2011; Grosvenor and Hall, 2012; Priem and Thyssen, 2013; Colleldemont, 2014; Allender, 2016; Dussel, 2016.

as historians. As historians we are living in a digital present and we have to be conscious of not just the past, but the present and the possible futures that are already under construction in the present. To this end the convenors of the workshop would like to invite presentations which will address a range of issues. These could include:

- Why is there still reluctance amongst historians to use the visual?
- What ethical issues emerge with the use of the visual in historical research?
- What are the differences between the production of an image and the secondary production hidden in the process of its utilization?
- How do sites of visual engagement – whether a classroom, a museum, an archive or a domestic space – impact on the process of visual interaction, be it as a school child or a researcher, and the dialogues produced in these spaces?
- Which consequences has the shift to digital accumulation and distribution systems had for the permanence and accessibility of the historic record?
- How has the relationship between historians and librarians/archivists changed as a consequence of the latter becoming digital gatekeepers in a new economy of preservation and access? How have archives been reshaped in these processes?
- How do we engage with the huge, ever rapidly expanding virtual archive of historical knowledge which none of us can ever hope to become familiar with more than a tiny fraction?
- How have new imaging technologies shifted the relationship between the real and the artificial, considering that the aura of believability and the truth claims associated with photography in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have become compromised as a source of ‘truth’ by the ease with which it is not only possible to construct visual fictions but also produce deceptively plausible evidence of scenes that do not exist and events that never took place?
- Technological changes have made it easier to use images and other primary sources for research and teaching, but availability does not guarantee understanding. How appropriate and robust for a visually rewritten world are the methods we use as historians? How might we change our practice so as to equip the next generation of visual researchers to critically engage with this world? Can the digital, as Thomas and Ayers (2005) pioneers in digital authoring have argued, make visible or reconfigure “deeper connections among documentation, evidence, and analysis than a single plane of fixed text can offer”?

The PCW will be structured around approximately seven provocation papers with a focus on theoretical and methodological issues that historians are struggling with when analysing visual source material under conditions that in turn are shaped by various forms of archival processes and technologies. Sharing these thoughts will provide those who are engaged with this kind of research an opportunity for rich discussions and those who are not yet engaged at present, but are interested in this kind of research, a short introduction and problem posing collaborative exercise that will help in their research when working with visual methodologies. We will also invite the audience to bring to the discussions issues, dilemmas or problems from their own research. To close, we will discuss the possibilities and limitations of visual analysis as a research strategy and its utility for history of education.

Program

‘LOOK AT ME.’ The enigma and value of ‘found’ photographs for historians of education

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Keywords

‘Found’; meaning-making; virtual archive; production; representation.

Abstract

In 1998 Frederic Bonn and Zoe Deleu found some photographs in a street in Paris and so began the *LOOK AT ME* Project. Today their collection of ‘lost, forgotten, or thrown away’ photographs can be found online at <http://look-at-me.tumblr.com/about> *LOOK AT ME* represents just one of an ever expanding number of sites which present nameless images, without connection to the people they show, or the photographer who took them. These collections include, for example, a facebook group called *Lost and Found*, the *Museum of Found Photographs*, an open to the public Flickr page that pools members' found photos and commercial sites which are organised so as to attract the interest of collectors. ‘Found’ photograph collections have been used to investigate the idea that art resides not so much in the production of ideas as in their conception. The Russian photographer Anastasia Rudenko, for example, has used ‘found’ sexualised photographs of Russian policewomen to explore complex themes of identity, power, dominance and self-representation (<http://anastasiarudenko.com/> British Journal of Photography *Lost and Found*, May 2014). Others have claimed, that ‘found’ photographs offer ‘something of an index for the metrics of intimacy’ (Frankham, 2014). But what is the value of such collections of recovered lost, unclaimed, or discarded photographs for historical research? How can we critically engage with such collections? Indeed, is it even possible to make sense of an incomprehensibly huge, rapidly expanding virtual archive of historical knowledge of which none of us can ever hope to become familiar with more than a tiny fraction, when as Michel Frizot has written that ‘for the eye, every photograph is an enigma’. For Frizot, the human gaze directed at a photograph reveals an enigma which in turn echoes the eye’s own questions’ (Frizot, 2015). John Berger has also pointed to an ‘abyss’ between the moment recorded in a photograph and the moment of looking and that “an instant photographed can only acquire meaning in so far as the viewer can read into it a duration extending beyond itself”, and it is when we find a photograph meaningful that we lend “it a past and a future” (Berger, 2013). This paper will use a collection of found photographs discovered during a visit to Riga in 2014 and Budapest in 2016 to consider the questions raised above by exploring the problems associated with the enigma of the ‘found’ image and the natural desire of the viewer to find meaning and thereby granting ‘found’ images a ‘past and a future.’

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- <https://lostandfoundphotographs.wordpress.com/>
- <http://liamfrankland.com/portfolio/lost-and-found-photography/>

Struggling with found photos. An amateur album on children's games (1902) and the winding road to make sense of it

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Keywords

Found photos; visual archive; amateur photography; children's images; children's games; Argentina.

Abstract

While doing research at the National Archives in Argentina, I accidentally found a set of 77 pictures produced by the Society of Amateur Argentinean Photographers (SFAA), which portray children's plays. Little is known about them except for their inventory number, sometimes a title and a date in 22 cases (March-September 1902). Pictures aren't signed, as the SFAA promoted a collective authorship.

These *objets trouvés* pose many challenges. How to read these pictures? Trying to unravel their social biography (Edwards & Hart, 2004), I sought to investigate the SFAA, active between 1889 and 1925. It was founded by wealthy men who embraced amateur photography as part of a social and political renewal (Priamo, 1997; Mirás, 2001, Cuarterolo, 2012; Pectorini, 2015), not unlike the British experience (Edwards, 2010). Their photographs had both a flair of social documentary, recording poverty and different social types, and of pictorialism as a new trend in photography.

Besides authorship, there are visual cultures and technological possibilities, as well as discourses about childhood and play that are at stake in the legibility of these pictures. A first exercise in reading them gives some hints about these features. The images portray daily activities and have a naturalistic air, but hints of staging and posing are evident. 50 pictures were taken indoors, at schoolyards or home *patios*; 20 show ostensibly poor children (in ragged clothes or barefoot) and other 20 socially mixed groups; 35 only include boys, 28 only girls; 53 show mixed age groups – only four with adults in them. A remarkable finding is that 8 photos portray black kids: Afroargentineans were still a relevant presence in urban centers at that time. These mixtures (gender, age, social class, race) show the extent to which the photographers were interested in producing an imaginary of social and racial minglings ('the melting pot'), but also its limits. As for material culture, the presence of toys and commercial merchandise is quite uncommon; even children who dress in costly attire play with improvised apparel made of wood or cardboard boxes. Only 11 pictures show the use of marbles, slings, ropes, cards, or rings; one single exception is a picture of four girls playing with dolls and a dollhouse, and a young boy tinkering with a construction game. In 8 pictures, textbooks, notebooks and bags are visible, generally put aside because of fights or rough play. There are scenes of reading and storytelling, even if the most common are games with a high physical content that do not involve playthings (Marsh & Bishop, 2014).

What does this corpus say about how children were imagined in Argentinean visual culture at the beginning of the 20th century, and of photography's role in this régime of representation? Through these pictures, one can see how games were acquiring prominence as activities where children could find and produce freedom, creativity, and autonomy. Also, photography was gaining new grounds with its promise of a mimetic and beautiful representation of social life, producing a particular visibility of children's bodies and actions.

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Remediating the past: The history of Luxembourg's steel industry from glass plate negatives to archived digital positives and exhibition artefacts

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Keywords

Photography and agency, industrial history, institutional collaboration, exhibition design, material culture.

Abstract

In 2007, a group of alumni from the *Institut Emile Metz*, a vocational training school in Luxembourg linked to the steel company ARBED, discovered a collection of about 3.000 glass plates in an attic of the school. The plates had been made between 1913 and 1962 to document the creation and the evolution of the *Institut Emile Metz* in the framework of the corporate welfare initiatives of the company. Moreover, they made visible the history of the adjacent steel and iron plants by showing a large variety of subjects, such as portraits of workers and employees, spectacular factory products made with cutting edge technologies, but also commemorations and, more generally, important moments in the life of the corporation. The plates had been kept over decades in their original boxes. They were carefully labelled and catalogued, and they were regularly used in print media or for promotional exhibitions. In the 1970s, the original annotations were transferred from the boxes into a series of notebooks. Then, with the decline of the steel industry in Luxembourg, the plates were put away to the attic, where they were eventually forgotten.

Their serendipitous re-discovery thirty years later, however, reactivated them to a new life: they were brought to the national audio-visual archives, the Centre national de l'audiovisuel (CNA); they were restored and digitised, and they are now professionally preserved as national photographic heritage. As such, they were presented to a scholar, who put them at the core of a research project in 2012.

Investigating on an academic level the impact of the steel industry on the Luxembourg society, the FAMOSO project also has a public outreach component: an exhibition of the found glass plates and

their remediations over time (Bolter and Grusin 2000). My presentation for the ISCHE pre-conference workshop wants to give an account of the reflection processes that led to this exhibition, from the initial research and concept to the final display of the found visual objects as material performances of Luxembourg's industrial past (Edwards 2009; Pinney 2005). I want to consider issues of materiality and the transformations of the original glass plates into digital documents and contemporary prints made for the exhibition. I want to discuss editorial, curatorial and design choices that needed to be made to give access to 21st century visitors to a body of images produced a hundred years earlier, to highlight the difficulties in attempting to make their histories come alive again. Finally, as one of the curators of the show, I would also like to reflect on the collaboration between scholars and cultural institutions such as archives and museums (Bal 2011; Bal 1999), and propose an auto-ethnographic analysis of a common endeavour: to understand the agency of photographs as complexly bundled, culturally salient visual objects embedded in the everyday of their makers and users.

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We need to change the formal logic to use the images as a source for the history of education?

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Keywords

Aesthetic approach; epistemology of visual research; children's agency; history of education; films.

Abstract

Sometimes an image, scene or a small cinematographic frame get fixed on our memory and become a referent to understand another time or a different society. Going moreover of being a decorative tool (or a rest of the avid lecture) or an evidence (Burke, 2001), this image, scene or small frame became the means of a mental representation (as an equivalence of the narrative in the verbal discourses). The potentiality of this attachment can be the engine of a research when it opens different questions, when it allows a set of inquiries. When, it is not conclusive, closed to itself, despite the unavoidable staticity of the images (Zubiry, 1980).

Through the research experience done the last years, we can conclude that we need the contrast between two or more images, two or more attachments for going further and polish a verisimilitude representation about distant realities (Burke, 2001). It is possible because the single attachments need to be contradicted, but also to superpose, being nuanced and retouched. Do those details, those alterations create the verisimilitude of the representations of the past and show us the imagined communities (knowing this representations where not the reality, but a self-representation). An access,

which in the academic field allows different discourses, is using the ‘poetical reason’ (Zambrano, 1989) which eludes the verbal logic and discourse, as they are imaginaries with an aesthetical basis (as was stated by Goethe and Hölderlin).

As such, the question at stake is about the grammatical conditions of studying the history of education through the visual sources. We try to answer it with the analysis of four documentaries produced during the Primo de Rivera Dictatorship (Spain, 1923-1931) which have as a subject the education in different community contexts.

For this experiment, we have as focal point the question about the children’s agency. We develop the study using a film produced in a colonial community (*Expedición a Guinea*, 1930, with an unknown director and producer); in the insular community of Gran Canaria (*A pesar de todo*, 1926, Gran Canaria Films S.A.); in the rural peninsular community (*Benedicció del Grup Escolar i Bandera del Somatent*, 1928, també de direcció i producció de desconeguts); and in the urban peninsular context (*¿Qué es España?*, 1926, España Films, Luís Araquistán y Cayetano Coll).



Between the fixed images, we have selected those in which appear children, studying their actions. In what follows, we have made some juxtapositions between images and the information available through documents. In this process we have observed that in the visual representations of the period, the children’s community is relevant as a sample of a large population in which the individuals are not

important. As a consequence, we can say that in the context of dictatorship the individual subjectivity disappears within visual productions and develops into a collective subject.



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Touching sound. Methodological reflections on a visual history

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Keywords

Rhythmic gymnastics and training of the senses; disability; Mimi Scheiblauser; René Burri; Werner Bischof

Abstract

Our paper explores biographies, geographies and networks of visual media on rhythmic gymnastic exercises with deaf-mute children. More particularly, the paper addresses how photographs of Mimi Scheiblaue's work at a school for disabled children in Zurich materially and virtually travelled the world and how their contents, connections and entanglements could possibly inspire a future visual history of the senses. Such a history would consider processes of archiving, digitization and dissemination of photographs and, as such, would reflect upon the constant reconfiguration of a growing body of images.

The Swiss music therapist Mimi Scheiblaue assumed an important role in rhythmic gymnastics and training of the senses of deaf-mute children after the Second World War, when many European countries were in need of innovative approaches. As a young woman Mimi Scheiblaue studied with Emile Jaques-Dalcroze in Geneva. Later, in 1912, she was appointed as a lecturer at the Zurich Conservatoire where she also received a special assignment to teach music therapy in 1924. Alongside her work at the Conservatoire, she founded a Zurich-based school for deaf-mute children in 1926. Two Swiss Magnum photographers, Werner Bischof and René Burri, have documented Scheiblaue's pioneering work at the school. They did so eleven years apart. The vast majority of Bischof's photographs appeared in 1944 in the Swiss monthly *Du*, while a selection of Burri's photographs appeared in 1955 in *Science & Vie* and *Life* magazine. As such, the photographs not only exist as tangible contact prints to be found in physical archives but can also be traced as reproductions in magazines that have survived in physical form. Meanwhile digital versions of the magazines and photographs started circulating on the World Wide Web and some of the images (including one of Burri's contact prints) were published in Magnum's digital photography archive. Others appeared in exhibition catalogues that celebrated the photographers as leading artists. As if that were not enough, even more photographs of Scheiblaue's work, taken by various other photographers, can be traced in printed and digitized versions in the German Dance Archive in Cologne. As well as photographs, three documentary films have been produced, all of which were subsequently made available on videotape and DVD.

The paper explores how historians could find new ways of storytelling on the basis of expanding assemblages of images. We begin by analysing the moment of image production from the specific perspective of training of the senses. Thereafter our focus is on the biographies and geographies of a selected body of photographs; how they appeared in magazines and exhibition catalogues and how they found their way into digital and physical archives. In a third section we analyse how the images operated as relational objects and still operate in various nodes of meaning making, thus continuing to contribute to notions of training of the senses of deaf-mute children. By way of conclusion we discuss in a more general way why and how photography and the growing number of reproductions could play a major role in the history of education.

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Digital Images

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"Plus que mon violon d'Ingres": Child study and the documentary impulse in animated photography

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Keywords

Documentary (impulse); film; child study; new education; Ovide Decroly.

Abstract

When I wrote my dissertation on the Belgian educational reformer Ovide Decroly (1871-1932), I also included a short chapter on the "filmmaker" Decroly (Van Gorp, 2005, pp. 141-149). In this chapter, I briefly discussed the context and the two genres that characterized Decroly's engagement with film: his "psychological films" on the one hand and the films on the Decroly School I afterwards labeled as "documentary propaganda" on the other (Van Gorp, 2011). While I have shown and discussed footage of both genres at several conferences (e.g., ECER and ISCHE), it turned out to be very difficult not to use the material as mere illustrations. And I have to admit that after all those years I am still struggling with the question what to do with it. There obviously is no clear-cut answer to such a question, but while I succeeded in writing an article on the second genre mentioned (van Gorp, 2011), I am still

finding my way to do something comparable, something ‘meaningful’ if you want with the genre of psychological films.

Alas, when you wait too long, you run the risk of others running away with ‘your idea’ and writing the article you could have written. This is exactly what happened to me (see Wagnon, 2013), but at the same time it made me aware that this PCW allows me to try something different. What if I would not consider Decroly’s psychological films as simply ‘illustrating’ the evolution in Decroly’s work from “psychogenesis” to “psycho-pedagogy” (see Wagnon, 2013, p. 110), but as a medium that is born of “the documentary impulse” (Franklin, 2016)? With it, Franklin refers to “the passion to record the moments we experience and wish to preserve, the things we witness and might want to reform, or simply the people, places or things we find remarkable”. The driving forces to explain this impulse encompass “the search for evidence, for beauty, even for therapy – and always the search to make memories immortal” (Franklin, 2016, p. 5).

Since Decroly called child study “plus que mon violon d’Ingres” – more than just a hobby – and referred to it as his “passion” and “a sort of instinct” (Decroly, 1933, p. 239), also taking into account that there is a lot of unedited footage available showing scenes that Decroly and his companions shot at home and in the Decroly institutes, I am wondering (1) whether it is possible to consider Decroly’s psychological films part of ‘the documentary record’, and if so (2) what it could reveal about Decroly and documentary. Doing so, and tapping from Franklin’s book, I also hope to discover whether the “documentary impulse” is a useful concept to theorize about documentary in the history of education.

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Transnational imageries: re-working Westward vistas of the congenital Indian in the colonial/postcolonial world, 1800 – 2015

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Keywords

Empire; image; photography; postcolonial; colonial; India; imperialism.

Abstract

With this long time period in view this paper deploys new work on transnationalism (M. Middell and K. Naumann, 2010) to understand the visual products of power as India has connected with the outside world. The paper sees imperial and neo-imperial imperatives at work where the usual demarcation of Partition in 1947 is of less concern. Rather, the power structures of cultural oppression remain in place in the East/West interplay, even though the formal strictures of empire have long since withered away.

This paper will examine the phenomenon of image making in and about India. It will show how the image and its subjects remain embedded in the Indian cultural domain. However, it will also demonstrate that the purpose of these displays continues to be to provide 'outside' audiences in the West with the required dynamic needed to objectify the 'Indian' as well as her or his 'Indianness' (C. Pinney, 1997). As in the colonial era, these images continue to exemplify the Eastern as a cultural 'curio', on display in the West, but also symptomatic of India's failure to reach a seemingly attainable global 'modernity' (D. Chakrabaty, 2002).

Before looking back into history, the first section of this paper examines three modern-day films about Indian culture and learning that are contorted by the Western lens. They are *Lagaan* (2001), *Slum Dog Millionaire* (2008) and the *Second Best Exotic Merigold Hotel* (2015). These films are contained within a Bollywood overlay where the dancing Indian subject (female and male) moves from the Indian demure (legs and arms covered) to something as revealing as Western soft porn. What is more significant, however, is that these particular films are transnational sites, Westward looking, that excavate deficit and degenerate Indian socio-cultural custom when it comes to Western learning. They recreate the power-structures of the colonial past: where the Western audience acts as moral scrutineer, anxious about India's social chaos but only in so far as it prevents her contribution to a Western-orchestrated and controlled global commerce.

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